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# Review of *Crisscrossing Borders in Literature of the American West* edited by Reginald Dyck and Cheli Reutter

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*Crisscrossing Borders in Literature of the American West*. Edited by Reginald Dyck and Cheli Reutter. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. viii + 243 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$85.00.

With its uninspired Pepto-Bismol pink-colored cover, *Crisscrossing Borders in the Literature of the American West* might escape attention. That would be a loss because this new collection, edited by Reginald Dyck and Cheli Reutter, is a striking series of essays that simultaneously argue for and model new postnational and transnational approaches to western literary studies. In the introduction, Dyck asks, "Is it possible to have a western literary studies that recognizes the many forms of difference that create borders within and around the region while neither reifying those borders nor discounting their power?" The strategies employed by the various authors suggest that it is—with promising (although not necessarily comforting) examinations of unexpected examples of western literatures.

The collection is grouped into three parts: "A Postnational West: New Challenges to Old Stories"; "Intersecting Stories: The Working-Class West"; and "Transnational Wests: Engaging the Hemisphere, Crossing the Ocean." For readers used to thinking about the American West as a specifically delineated region within a specific nation, virtually every essay in each section is an occasion to reconsider that thinking. For example, new challenges to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis provide a starting point for Robert Crooks's essay on African American detective fiction and for Rüdiger Heinze's study of Mormons and their "central outsider" status in narratives of the American West. Melissa Homestead's essay on Willa Cather (long a canonical figure) and Bess Streeter Aldrich (all but disappeared from view) not only investigates the complex, class-riddled process of canon-making with women writers and the pioneer story, but also addresses literary taste-making that values "high art" over its "middlebrow" best sellers. Other essays bring together current transnational approaches to questions of gender, class, identity, and environmentalism.

If the volume appears to have a weakness, it is its lack of unity. The introduction's title, "New Models for Western Literary Studies," would be a useful subtitle, as the image of "crisscrossing borders" is employed to unify the collection at the same time it

emphasizes its honed focus on differences. Yet that is much the point the collection seeks to make: we do not now have, nor have we ever had, a unified American West—or a unified theory of it. The variety of provocative approaches, new critical inquiries, and challenges to comfortable but worn ways of thinking embodied in this collection returns to us a variety of American Wests that have much to tell us about our multiple pasts and our various futures.

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